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# CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

1854 - 1954

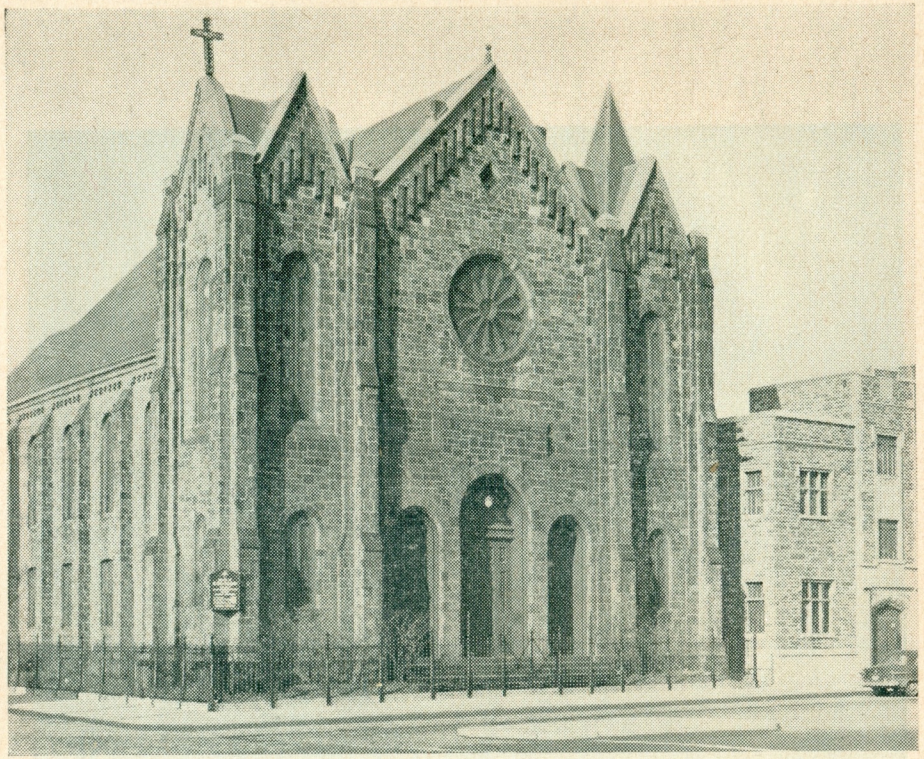
## CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST

THIRD AND REED STREETS
PHILADELPHIA

## *Appreciation*

Sincere thanks to all the loyal members of St. John's who have made this One Hundredth Anniversary possible.

There were many who gave willingly of their time and effort to make this affair a success. We are truly grateful.



# THE CALENDAR

*of*

# CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST

(EPISCOPAL)

**THIRD AND REED STREETS • PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA**

**SERVICES**

Holy Communion
- Every Sunday ..... 8.00 A. M.
- First and Third Sundays ..... 10.00 A. M.
- Holy Days ..... 7.00 A. M.

Morning Prayer (Second and Fourth Sundays) ..... 10.00 A. M.

Church School ..... 11.15 A. M.

Young People's Fellowship ..... 7.15 P. M.

Holy Baptism ..... By Arrangement

THE REV. CHARLES H. URBAN

*Church Phone:* HOward 8-4020 • *Rectory Phone:* FUlton 9-6522

*Sexton's Phone:* HOward 5-2381

REV. CHARLES H. URBAN

My Dear Friends:

May I extend to all of you our heartfelt gratitude to Almighty God for His beneficent care and protection for all of us during the past years.

For a century now The Church of St. John The Evangelist has been a witness for the eternal verities of life. Many of its members have entered into the Church Triumphant. It is for us of this present age, so to dedicate ourselves and be willing to sacrifice ourselves to maintain this heritage and furthermore to perpetuate it for the years to come.

We are ever mindful of the heroic examples of those who have borne the burden of the past to sustain and extend the work of kindling the flame of the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men, women and children of this Community, and we welcome and implore all of you to aid and support us in this noble enterprise.

Likewise we are mindful of the encouragement and assistance of all those who have so graciously enriched us by their many expressions of good will and favor.

God grant to all of us the furtherance of His perpetual Mercy, Grace and Blessing.

Faithfully yours,

Charles H. Urban,

Rector.

# The History of the Church of St. John the Evangelist

## IN THE BEGINNING . . .

Amid the affairs of famous men and great nations in the year of 1854, two comparatively obscure ladies of the district of Southwark in Philadelphia County were beginning an endeavour which we today know as the Church of Saint John the Evangelist. To these ladies the Boone Street Mission was an answer to a problem, a satisfaction of a need, the result of conviction. The world in which these two school teachers lived was, like all times in history's pages, a world filled with wars and rumors of wars, chaos and uncertainty. We scan the headlines of our newspapers of 1954, shake our heads, and then wearily wonder if there's much of a future for humanity. We are apt to feel that mankind is doing all it can to destroy itself. And in 1854 the people felt much the same as we do today and as people have always felt in every era of human history. Europe a hundred years ago was seething in a war that claimed more lives than its ignoble purpose warranted. Yet out of the blackness of the Crimean War came the beginning of the nursing profession as Florence Nightingale fought convention and military authority to bring about her merciful mission. The British Empire was in her crusade of expansion, bringing under the English rule the colonies which made her greater by each conquest. And out of England of that time came a new social order which, even after a hundred years, is felt today—the Victorian Age.

In the United States the people were gravely concerned with issues that would in a few years lead to national disunity; the matters of States-Rights, tariff on cotton, slavery, were bringing the United States closer to crises never before faced by our nation. But in Philadelphia there was—in some political corners—cause for gladness, for on February 1, 1854, the districts of Northern Liberties, Southwark, and eleven other outlying areas were made officially a part of the City of Philadelphia by the Act of Consolidation. And in one small section of the newly consolidated district begins the story of Saint John's; a story which two spinster school teachers hardly expected would be told a hundred years after their initial efforts to bring the Light of the Gospel to the poor folk of the "wilderness" where they began the Boone Street Mission.

Going back a century, the district of Southwark was an area made up of marshes, dirt roads gutted with carriage wheels, and wooded stretches. To the contemporaries Southwark was divided into two parts: the Ma'shes and the Neck. Along the marshes were houseboats moored to the high banks and the people



living in them lived largely off the fowl and fish found there and the vegetables grown along banks. South of the marshes was the Neck and the Neckers sustained themselves mainly by truck farming, giving rise to a rivalry between the Ma'shers and Neckers. Entertainment for these rustic people of Southwark was easily had a century ago by creating a reason to prove each others' worth through competitive tournaments of more graceful nature, or simply by rioting.

However, these two feuding societies did not comprise the entire population of Southwark, for, despite its reputation, it was a community of lower middle class, hard-working people. The people of Southwark were employed generally by the foundries and the Philadelphia Navy Yard which, at that time, was located nearby. And it was among all this that the Misses Selbey and Jameson perceived a lamentable need for religious instruction and set about to establish the Boone Street Mission. At the door of a small school building the gentle women stood, trying to persuade each passing child of a need which he was unaware of, a necessity which the apathy of parents too long away from church had failed to provide. With prayer and patience a Sunday School was built up over a period of many weeks and the two diligent Christians were finding encouragement to plan for a thriving, sucessful project.

It was in 1855 that the Church realized the possibilities of organizing a mission in an area which was without a place to worship in the immediate vicinity. Thus, to this congregation of fifty-odd souls came the Rev. George Latimer, a newly ordered deacon, to work with the ladies and to develop the potentialities of a new mission of the Episcopal Church. Even in 1855, seemingly, it paid to advertise, and the Rev. Mr. Latimer had circulars and placards printed which were distributed in the surrounding community.

By December of 1854 the Sunday School increased from four teachers and fifty scholars to eight teachers and 125 children. With money that was begged by Miss Selbey and Miss Jameson the Mission Sunday School was able to obtain a second-hand stove and a half-ton of coal to see them through the winter. Until February of 1855 the Boone Street Mission provided only religious instruction for the children, perhaps laying a foundation for a congregation. Then, on Sunday, February 25, 1855, the first Evening Prayer Service was held. In attendance at this initial service were twenty children and twenty adults. Surely an admirable congregation when we consider how humbly and meagerly the Mission began.

Throughout the year of 1856 the Rev. George Latimer began a thorough campaign to recruit Sunday School teachers, a larger congregation of adults, and, in general, worked diligently with the hope that the Boone Street Mission might become a Mission able to apply for parochial status in the diocese. The Rev. Mr. Mortimer's *modus operandi* was mostly through appeal by circulars and newspaper promotion. An excerpt from the Pennsylvania Inquirer of December, 1856 states:

> AN INTERESTING FAIR: A Fancy Fair will be commenced this morning, and continue until Wednesday evening, the 24th inst., in aid of the fund of the Boone Street Mission, at No. 119 South Third Street. The objects of this charity are truly noble, and now that winter has set in with remarkable severity, the claims of the poor and destitute will be unusually pressing, and we hope the benevolence of our citizens and their families will not be

appealed to in vain. The Rev. George Latimer is the Missionary. A brilliant and tasteful collection of articles will be supplied by ladies and other friends of the institution. And we observe with pleasure, that two superb statues of Christian and Apollyon, life-size, will be exhibited on the occasion. They are remarkably artistic, and in grouping, attitude and expression, faithfully represent an incident in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.

Nor was the Mission without other aid. The community itself, as well as neighboring philanthropic groups were eager to help in numerous ways. Money for the financing of the Mission came from several sources, clothing to warmly dress the children of the Mission came from others, and the people of the Boone Street Mission worked tirelessly to aid themselves. The year of 1856 was an encouraging one for the Boone Street Mission, and it was upon the impetus supplied by the community that the Rev. Mr. Latimer began to think quite seriously of establishing a permanent place of worship.

Quoting from Parish Register No. 1, dated 1855 to 1885:

> Then, what seemed at the time to be a misfortune, befell the enterprise. Sometime in the latter half of the year of 1857 their little place of worship, the School House in Boone St. was burned at night, by fire. 'They were brought low.'—*(Written by Rev. W. B. Erben.)*

The newspaper account of the fire was short and vague, adding to the Rev. Mr. Erben's notation only that the extent of damage was estimated at $100.00—a considerable sum in 1857! While the Shiffler Hose Company, located at Second and Reed Streets, was unable to save the Mission building they did, nevertheless, invite the Boone Street Mission to use the second floor of the fire house. The Mission continued at the fire house for two years, during which time the people were busy soliciting aid to build a new building for the Mission. Unfortunately the attendance suffered during these two years because—as the Rev. Mr. Erben explains—"It seemed, and in truth was, *so unchurchlike!*" Yet, while the Boone Street Mission was located at the Shiffler Hose Company, the church managed to save a few firemen from sentence of more than house fires; several of the members of the Hose Company were baptized and confirmed and became parishioners of what was to become the Church of Saint John the Evangelist.

As seemed to have been Mr. Latimer's strategy, he began publicizing the Mission's plight to the good people of Southwark, the City of Brotherly Love, and to the Diocese of Pennsylvania.

Parish socials, bazaars, lectures, demonstrations, variety shows and lantern slides were means to the end that the Boone Street Mission might again rebuild and carry on its work in a more *churchlike* environment. Help came slowly at first due partly to the Money Crises of 1857, a financial recession in Philadelphia which caused mass unemployment and bank failures. Then, throughout the year of 1858 and the better part of 1859 the labor engaged in by the Rev. Mr. Latimer's flock bore fruit. However, Mr. Latimer was not present to see his triumph take place. In February, 1859, the Rev. Mr. Latimer, now an ordained priest, lost heart and accepted a call in Schuylkill Haven, Pa., leaving the struggling congregation to carry on and to rebuild. Until July of 1859 the Mission held divine services whenever a clergyman could be procured and, on several occasions, had to be content with the services of a Lay Reader.



The Assistant Bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania was informed of the Mission's quandary. The Rt. Rev. Samuel Bowman contacted the Rev. Samuel Durborow, then Rector of the Church of the Evangelists at 8th and Catharine Streets, who agreed to see that the Boone Street Mission had a building to meet in. The Rev. Mr. Durborow, however, stipulated that the Rev. Washington B. Erben be placed in charge of the Mission and that the Mission assume the responsibility of paying part of the Missionary's salary, as well as their own current expenses.

> The members of the Mission pledged themselves, to pay all the current expenses of the Mission, and to raise a salary of $200. per annum for their Minister.
>
> The Rev. S. Durborow agreed to raise also an additional sum of $200. per annum, for the Minister's salary, thus making a salary of $400.!!—*(From Parish Register No. 1.)*

In August of 1859 a plot of ground was purchased for the amount of $1000.00 on Reed Street above Second; on this lot was erected "a neat brick Chapel," costing $2000.00 and seating about 250 persons. By December of that year the building was ready for use and was used for both worship services and Sunday School. Sunday, December 11, 1859, was a joyous day for the people of the newly chartered parish of the Church of Saint John the Evangelist. For on that day the first public service was held, having the Rt. Rev. Samuel Bowman officiating and preaching the first sermon in the Church of Saint John the Evangelist. Following the sermon, the Bishop confirmed nine persons.

While in the area of St. John's "firsts," it might be interesting to list the Vestry that was so integral in the rebuilding of St. John's. According to present parish records they were:

Robert Kerr, Acctg. Warden
W. F. Smith
R. S. H. George, Treas., Bldg. Fund
Arthur McVeety
Samuel Kep
William Brinisholtz
James Wilson
John R. Hunter
H. G. Coursault
Alex. B. Sands
Thomas Magee

By the year of 1861 the parish was free from debt incurred by the rebuilding and boasted a congregation of 60 communicants and 200 Sunday School children. The Church of Saint John the Evangelist had become established and had a respite from the tribulations that so beset them in her earlier years of formation. To whom should the laurels be awarded for the achievement of a goal? Well, to many; the Bishop, The Revs. Durborow, Erben, the people of the community, the parishioners, the Vestry, and the host of small, unknown souls all had a share in the making of a temple.

October of 1861 saw the departure of the Rev. Mr. Erben, for he felt needed as a Chaplain in Col. Rush's Philadelphia Light Cavalry. The United States was in the beginning of the Civil War, a national conflict that would last four bitter years. Succeeding the Rev. Mr. Erben was the Rev. James W. Jones who, much to the disappointment of the parish, remained only five weeks, leaving to become Assistant Rector of St. Luke's Church. Following the Rev. Mr. Jones' rectorship, the Rev. John Long accepted the parish's call. He held the rectorship of St. John's until July, 1862, at which time he, too, was commissioned a Chaplain to serve in the military hospitals of Philadelphia.

In October of 1862 the Rev. Washington Erben was discharged from the army and again became rector of the Church of Saint John the Evangelist, and remaining in charge until 1864.

From the time of the Rev. Mr. Erben's resignation the parish faced a dilemma —the constant turnover of rectors and the slow progress that results from rapid and continual changes. From 1864 until 1884 St. John's rectors were:

Charles L. Fisher, 1864-1871
W. F. B. Jackson, 1872-1873
John G. Bawn, 1874-1876
Frank W. Winslow, 1877-
John Edgar Johnson, 1877-1884
George D. E. Mortimer, 1884-1891

The Rev. Mr. Mortimer's tenure at St. John's, like the Rev. Mr. Johnson's, was notable at this time for its length. In the Parish Register, dated May, 1891, we find:

> After a faithful and efficient ministry of about 6½ years the Rev. G. D. E. Mortimer answered the call to come up higher, his spirit returning unto God who gave it, May 1891. He was buried from the Church of Saint John the Evangelist, May 1891. Rt. Rev. O. W. Whitaker, D. D., Bishop of Pennsylvania officiating. Rev. John Moncure became Rector of the Parish November 22, 1891.
>
> The Rev. Mr. Moncure's rectorship lasted until the summer of 1901. He was succeeded by:
>
> G. A. Hanna, Priest-in-Charge, 1901-1906
> Royden Keith Yerkes, 1907-1908
> Edward H. Earle, 1909-1910
> G. Albert Redles, 1910-1912

For almost fifty years the Church of Saint John the Evangelist moved onward despite the ever recurring problem of frequent changes of rectors. Within that time it may be safe to say that St. John's remained not because of its leadership, but in spite of it! Reviewing past parochial records it is impossible to find within that period the quality of leadership that was the Rev. Mr. Erben's gift. Lack of proper leadership and direction is a blight to any parish and St. John's was no exception, for the attendance at divine services became almost nil despite the constant stream of baptisms performed during those years.



Thus St. John's congregation became so small in number that today we are able to say that there were a faithful seven or eight who attended the church services regularly. And it was that faithful few who had the supreme honor of helping St. John's regain its strength under the leadership of the Rev. Mr. Redles' successor, the Rev. H. Cresson McHenry.

## . . . GOD HATH SENT FORTH THE SPIRIT . . .

The Rev. H. Cresson McHenry came to St. John's in 1912 not at the Bishop's behest, nor at the express calling of the apathetic parishioners. In fact, it was the Bishop's desire and conviction in 1912 that St. John's was beyond saving and would have closed the church had it not been for the foresight of Mr. McHenry. He saw in St. John's greater possibilities than did the rectors of the previous fifty years and asked the permission to come here to instill in St. John's again the spirit that had built the church from its humble beginning.

With the help and grace of God, the cooperation and labors of the few remaining workers Mr. McHenry began the monumental task of re-establishing the "right spirit within us." It was an endeavor which took a decade and the effects of his leadership are seen and felt today very keenly and concretely. It was a period of leadership which lasted 35 years of constant growth and expansion, and more meaningful to us because many of us today have seen this progress.

Where can one begin to extol the work done by Mr. McHenry? It was he who was responsible for the formation of parish organizations like the Daughters of the King, Brotherhood of St. Andrew, a choir comparable to many of the best, here in our parish. Under Mr. McHenry's leadership the parish was able to realize the purchase of new church and Sunday School equipment, the organ, stained glass windows, numerous memorial furnishings, and, especially, the parish house.

In around the year of 1918 Mr. McHenry opened his summer cottage at Brown's Mills, New Jersey, as a summer camp for the children of the parish. The "Shack-in-the-Pines" was the shrine of many summer pilgrimages for parishioners for almost thirty years, and even the youngest of us today have stored up a wealth of memories due to Mr. McHenry's generosity.

But Mr. McHenry's rectorship cannot only be counted in material gain for the parish. He was indeed a beloved pastor to his flock, a priest long remembered by us today. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to recount the souls his counsel and love have saved.

The Rev. H. Cresson McHenry not only made good his aim of 1912 to rebuild St. John's, he has given us a pride and love for our church which has kept us working no matter what seemingly insurmountable odds we have faced. It is the spirit of laboring for Christ that he taught us that can perpetuate for another hundred years the Church of Saint John the Evangelist—the Spiritual Rock of Southwark!

In 1946 the Rev. H. Cresson McHenry resigned his cure to become Rector Emeritus of St. John's. On December 5, 1947, Mr. McHenry died suddenly and was buried from the church he labored in for 35 years on December 8, 1947.

Bishops Hart and Remington officiated at the burial, and the service was attended by many of clergy of the diocese not to mention the many mourning parishioners.

Upon Mr. McHenry's resignation in 1946 the Rev. Vernon Matthews accepted the call as rector and, in 1947, was officially instituted by Bishop Hart. During the Rev. Mr. Mattew's rectorship in St. John's the parish continued to grow both materially and spiritually. He was responsible for the revising of our Parish Charter—a revision which gave among other things the women the right to vote for vestrymen. During the years of 1941 and 1946 the Second World War prevented the parish from carrying on an effective young people's program, and our parish lacked in this until Mr. Matthews spurred the young people of the parish into forming the Young People's Fellowship which continues to this day. The H. Cresson McHenry Memorial Chapel was the result of Mr. Matthew's efforts to secure a place to hold services which usually made the use of the church proper impractical.

However, much to the disappointment of the parish, Mr. Matthews accepted a call to St. Peter's Mission in Broomall, and in September of 1949 left us to do God's work and will where a priest of his caliber was so urgently needed. And noting the advances St. Peter's Mission has made under his charge we are proud to know him as a former member of our parish, a past rector, and a friend.

Mr. Matthew's successor was the Rev. Allen F. Kremer, who, although a Chaplain of the University of Pennsylvania, was able to perform also the duties of a rector for our parish for almost two years.

Upon accepting the position of Chaplain at a college in New York, Mr. Kremer resigned his rectorship and was succeeded by the Rev. Norman C. Farnlof in 1951. It would be superfluous to recount here the strides forward the parish made under Mr. Farnlof's leadership, for we know them ourselves, and we shall long remember his example of Christian leadership. Upon his resignation in 1953, Rev. Charles H. Urban became our rector, coming to us from Japan, where he served as a major in the U. S. Army. His military service spanned a period of 13 years. Today Mr. Urban continues to keep burning the flame of Christian worship and endeavor in St. John's. He is faithful in his visits to our ill and shut-ins and ever reminding us of our duty to do the same.

In this year of 1954—our centennial year—we must keep in mind that we, like all those before us, are the history makers of St. John's. We have the choice as to whether someone will write of our times in glowing or disparaging terms in the year of 2054. Indeed, it is how we continue to fulfill our Christian task and perform our duties to the Church that will determine whether or not there will be St. John's in 2054.



On January 31, 1904, the Rev. George A. Latimer preached the sermon here in St. John's at the parish's Fiftieth Anniversary Service. His closing paragraph was applicable to the St. John's of 1904, but as all good advice is, it has a tone of lastingness so that we may derive good from his words.

> Beloved brethren and friends, let this present anniversary be a spur to further progressive work—a reconstruction of self and all your powers in the cause of Christ, especially in this branch of his Church, and this particular church. Remember your individual responsibility and accountability, not only to the officers of your own church, but to the great Head of the Church Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are all too apt to forget this *personality*. Like the great corporations of our great cities, they do many things they would not dare to do individually, yet they lose not their personal account by reason of their corporate capacity. So we are apt to forget our separate, individual duty and obligation in the midst of so many workers and instrumentalities. Let each one act conscientiously as if the whole prosperity of his Church rested upon himself alone, and yet in perfect love and harmony with all his fellow workers.

*We are indeed grateful to Captain Al Fink, Bob Ziegler and the other members of the Hegeman String Band who so kindly and willingly donated their music for the dancing of our 100th Anniversary banquet. There is nothing like the music of a string band to stir the hearts and feet of South Philadelphia.*

*Thank you most sincerely.*

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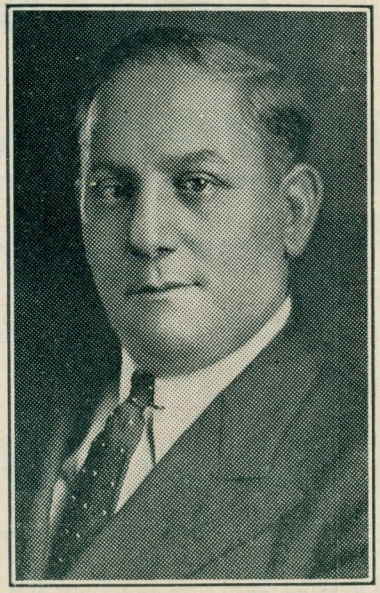

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Rock-a-Bye My Baby

**1937**—With Plenty of Money and You

**1935**—Darkness on the Delta

**1932**—Egyptian Ella

**1931**—Moonlight Saving Time

**1927**—Bridget O'Flynn

**1926**—Barber Shop Quartette Number

**1914**—When You Wore a Tulip

**FOREVER YOUNG**
She's Too Fat for Me
Can Can Girls
Glow Worm Ballet

**FINALE**
You'll Never Walk Alone
(with Friends at St. John's)
We'll Meet Again
Great Day

## SEEMS LIKE OLD TIMES

Seems like Old Times having you to walk with,
Seems like Old Times having you to talk with.
And it's still a thrill just to have the old crowd around me,
Still a thrill just to be here you'll agree.
Seems like Old Times with old friends together,
Just like Old Times as we face all kinds of weather.
But our dreams came true and we owe it all to you,
Good Old St. John's Church, you know we do.

## THAT OLD GANG OF MINE

Gee, but it's grand tonight to see
That Old Gang of Mine,
I can't forget that old quartette that sang Sweet Adeline;
We're here together, old fellows and gals,
We'll be forever old sweethearts and pals,
God bless them.
Gee, but it sure is fine to see that
Old Gang of Mine.

## REMEMBER

Remember the days,
The good old days.
We gathered here, Remember.
Remember the choir, the scouts, the plays we had here,
Remember.
Remember, we found great happiness,
And all of us here were many times blessed.
We promised St. John's we'd ne'er forget,
And we've returned to Remember.

## MEMORIES

Memories, memories of days at Old St. John's,
Though on other ways we've gone,
Our memories linger on.
Childhood days, wildwood days,
Days of tears and glee;
You guided us then, on you we depend,
We are proud of our memories.

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